1: Washington S-4 (no date) 1956 AF13 Northwest China AF13

In those cases where a man has more than one wife, each
*563 wife must have her own tent which will be within the area of the
595 encampment assigned to the husband. Within the tent the wife
593 frequently has full authority. It is she who welcomes and looks
574 after the guests and to whom farewells must be formally made.

As is the case with most of Tibet, the problem of polyandrous
*563 unions remains unclear. One authoritative source assigns such
595 unions to the nomads, and another will insist that it is a phenom-
114 enon of the sedentary Tibetans. Each produces logical explana-
tions for its appearance in the one and not in the other. Moreover,
the Tibetans themselves will state arbitrarily that it is commoner
in one group or the other, but again there is no unanimity of
opinion. Out of all the conflicting accounts, it can be deduced
that polyandry exists, probably, in both nomadic and sedentary
Tibetan populations and that peculiar local situations account for
its prevalence in one or the other area. However, it is doubtful
that it is uniformly practiced by any section of the population.
Side by side with polyandrous families, moreover, polygynous
unions are also found. Most common, is a more or less brittle
monogamy.

*563 Since the people of the black tents practice transhumance,
233 their nomadic activities are measured in terms of elevation,
• 221 rather than actual distance covered. From late spring through
fall the encampments as units climb to successively higher pas-
tures and then descend again. Winter finds them at their lowest
elevation and the group is no longer a tent-circle. Instead of the
[342] regular circular arrangement of the yak-hair tents, the winter
[361] settlement may consist of sod-covered huts, which may be of
wattle and daub construction, rammed earth, tent-roofed sod
walls or similar materials. There is no regular arrangement of
the huts, because the factors which led to the arrangement of the
campsites are not operative.

The different activities around the year help dictate the limits
of communal action. The short growing seasons of the successive
pastures, necessitate frequent shifts. Thus eight or nine move-
ments between winters are not uncommon. The tasks of striking
camp, keeping the herds along the route and reestablishing the
circles involve maximum cooperation from all involved. None
can travel with impunity ahead or behind the others. The encamp-
ments represent military units because raids and stealing herds
are recognized as rungs on the ladder to success.

*563 In winter, the activities are more diversified. Gone is the
221 constant vigilance against human and animal foes. Gone too, is
the necessity of frequent, simultaneous uprooting and reestab-
lishment. Life is conducted at a more leisurely and individual
*563 pace. Many of the nomads form trading caravans, which will
221 journey beyond the settlements of the Tibetan farmers to trade
437 their wool, hides, and other products among the Chinese Moslems.
These caravans may be composed of some of the men of a single

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*563 encampment, or they may consist of a group of friends or relatives.
• 221 Some go only to the neighboring farmers, but more gain is to be
[437] found in the trade at the border. Winter also is the time for weaving the yak hair cloth, for preparing and repairing equipment, and for visiting and gossip. The period of high festivity is approaching.

*563 The traders return from their travels and the nomads flow en
221 masse to the monastery centers for the observation of the mid-
796 winter festival. During the festivals religion is combined with both
792 pleasure and business. Almost every family has its representa-
[443] tives among the monks so that family reunions heighten the gaiety
[584] of the season. Trade is brisk for the monastery centers are also market towns. Maidens contract alliances with the swashbuckling young nomads, and some of these affairs ripen into marriages. Business of another nature may also be contracted at this time.

*563 Once the spring movements commence, the nomads find it advisable
221 to travel with a minimum of baggage both for actual convenience of
579 movement, and to lessen the loss incurred should a raid occur.
[792] Thus advantage is taken of this opportunity to store one's valuables
[488] in the care of the monastery, and more particularly with a monk related to the owner. From mid-winter until the horses are too jaded in early spring, the major occupation can only be described as robbery and attempted robbery. Large-scale caravans from other parts of Tibet and from China make the most desirable prey.

*563 Ekvall and Yu reported that the winter grazing grounds belonged
423 to the encampment, and that the territories in which the pastures
621 were located, and assigned, were the property of the larger units
619 (or tribes, as they are sometimes called) consisting of a number of encampments. The winter hay fields were individual's own property.

*563 These units might be under the jurisdiction of a chief or they might
423 form a rather loose confederation without marked central authority.
622 In some instances the actual "chief" might be one of the local
[792] monasteries, whose head will exercise civil authority over the laity. Infrequently a chief might even control several larger units, in which case he would be referred to as gyalpo or "king." But

*563 even the most nearly autocratic chief exercised caution in asserting
622 his position, lest a disgruntled encampment, or some tents, might
628 leave his jurisdiction for the welcoming embrace of some other chief. The latter would then have complete information necessary for conducting a successful foray against the first group. Thus, just as within the encampment, the actual authority in these larger units rested in the hands of a council of elders, representing each of the component encampments.

*563 Although there are clans in Tibet which have played important
614 roles in the history of some of the ruling families, they perform
[621] no major function among the Tibetan nomads. The encampment is not based on clan affiliation. Such affiliations even cross the lines of the larger units. (Cf. Ekvall, 1939 and Yu, 1947). The clan

2: Teichman G-5 (1919) 1921 AF13 Northwest China AF13

PLATE XLVI

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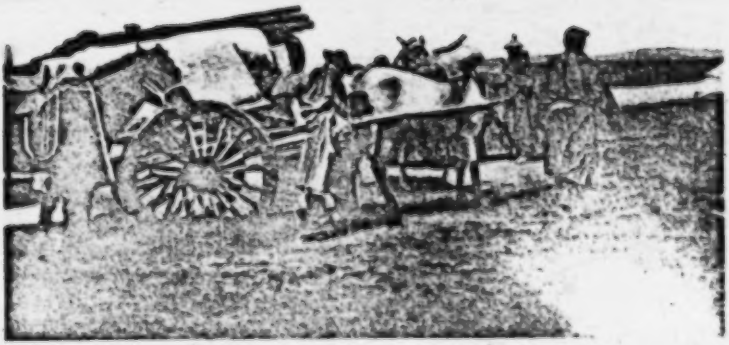
MONGOLS MOVING CAMP



MONGOLS MOVING CAMP

[FACING P 193]

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Kalmuk

remarkably open and honest nature which quickly drew me closer to him. He wanted, of course, to do business with me, but he did not, like all the rest, waste a lot of time charging the highest prices which one then had to force down to the proper amount with a lot of haggling. I bought sheep, yaks and horses from him and then he told me a great deal about his life, about the many, many disputes with the Horkurma Tibetans up at the source waters of the Hwang Ho. Once they drove away 100 camels belonging to the Barun, and gave them up again only for a high ransom although they could not even use them in their swamps. He sighed over the life of the nomad, over the great nuisance of having to change camp-sites, of endlessly having to pack and unpack household goods, and said he envied the farmer who could call a stationary house his own. He complained of their poor customs, of the fact that within their families, in decided contrast to those of the Chinese, they always differentiate very strictly between "mine" and "thine," that their women have too many rights and that this causes endless quarrels, that trading was difficult because the women had too little vision and would often not permit the most favorable cattle sale. "The women take pride only in having large herds, they never consider how quickly an epidemic can snatch away the animals, or robbers carry them off." At the time of my visit, people were busy shearing the sheep. The thick winter wool was cut off and half pulled out with iron shears a foot long. (1)

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1. A picul (100 catties or 65 kilograms) of the rather coarse wool of Mongolian sheep cost 4 taels in Barun. Two and one-half tael were charged for the transport from Tsaidam to Dankar, so that on the Chinese border a picul costs the merchants to 6 1/2 taels=20 marks. While I was in Barun a mounted courier arrived from Dankar with a document saying that the agents of the Yang Hang (the Tientsin firms) had set the price per picul at 9 taels for this year and could not give a cash more. The resultant increase of 2 1/2 taels for the small wool-buyer was considered much too little. The wool business of Tsaidam was thereby supposed to have become practically profitless. The year before, 11-12 taels was paid per picul by the Yang Hang in Dankar.

The yak cattle are also sheared in July, that is to say, their belly hair, which is used for making Tibetan tent walls and for ropes, is plucked out by the owners. The

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entire body of the yak cattle is covered with a thick mat of hair which, on the belly, becomes a foot long and changes to rather stiff hairs. The wool as well as the bristles are always pitch-black in wild yaks and usually so in domestic ones. But after the hairs have been plucked out and exposed to the weather and to moisture, they quickly turn a reddish-brown and then resemble old mammoth-hairs such as one finds in the ice of Siberia; the mammoths were undoubtedly all raven-black at one time like the wild yaks.

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After a few days of rest three of us, Han, Tsch'eng and I rode toward Barun kurä with only mules and horses. We again traveled down the stony and pathless Wulasetä Valley and then, as a result of a misunderstanding, set out from the mouth of the valley in a north-northwest direction into the plain. Thus it happened that when we again met human beings we were in Dsun, that is, in the territory of the banner-dsassak of Dsun which was west of Barun. Behind a 10 kilometer-wide, barren belt of rubble known as the schala, which embraces the foot of the mountain, there is a zone of dunes scarcely one kilometer wide following the southern border of Tsaidam; then there is a more or less wooded zone consisting of tamarisk, and finally, beyond this, the pasture land, the zone where /348/ the water that flows down from the mountains and is absorbed by the schála, gushes out again, irrigating and making the ground fertile once more before it loses itself in sterile salt swamps toward the middle of the Tsaidam basin.

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Here in Dsun I again tried to add to my herd of sheep, but no one had the courage to do business with me. It is the custom in all five dominions of the Tsaidam Mongols that the rulers have a sort of business monopoly in their territory. Their subjects may carry on business with a stranger only when the ruler has covered his needs or if he expressly permits it. Dyoba Dyentsen, too, first had to get permission from the dsassak to sell me his animals.

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Because the dsassak of Dsun lived too far off my route, I myself did not visit him. He is said to live on a walled estate in the middle of his country. His domain is about 40 kilometers long and 5 kilometers wide and consists of fertile pasture land. Belonging to it is also an area of wasteland extending over many days' marches. The Dsun (140 families with one squadron) graze their herds only in the plains, in the narrow zone between the dunes on the edge of the Piedmont gravel and the salt swamps north of this.